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Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, questions relating to refugees, returnees and displaced persons and humanitarian questions

The situation in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan

Right of peoples to self-determination

Human rights questions: human rights questions, including alternative approaches for improving the effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms

Letter dated 24 February 2006 from the Permanent Representative of Armenia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Eighteen years ago the pogroms of Armenians in Sumgait marked the beginning of killings and later the depopulation of Azerbaijan of its almost half a million Armenian population. From 1988 to 1990, the deliberate manipulation of the Azerbaijani public led to the massacres of Armenians in three of the largest cities of Azerbaijan — Sumgait, Kirovabad (Ganja) and Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan. On 27 February 1988, Azeris went on a three-day rampage in Sumgait, an industrial town 20 miles from Baku, murdering members of the town's large Armenian minority, looting and destroying their property. The events were preceded by a wave of anti-Armenian statements and rallies that swept over Azerbaijan in February 1988. Most of the victims were burned alive after being assaulted and tortured. The murderers enjoyed total support of the Azerbaijani authorities and full freedom in committing these inhuman acts against the Armenian population.

The Sumgait events were organized with a view to hushing up and concealing the legal and peaceful quest of the Nagorno Karabagh people for self-determination after 70 years of unlawful subjugation to Azerbaijani rule. While the people of Nagorno Karabagh chose the constitutional and peaceful path to the exercise of its right, the response of the Azerbaijani authorities was pogroms and killings of Armenians. The premeditated killings in Sumgait were to transform the problem of

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Nagorno Karabagh from a peaceful, democratic and legal process into a violent confrontation.

This was the first time that ethnic cleansing was utilized in what was still a Soviet space. The international community's response to these horrific events was explicit. On 7 July 1988, the European Parliament adopted a resolution condemning the massacres in Sumgait,[1] which read:

"The European Parliament,

"...

"B. having regard to the historic status of the autonomous region of Nagorno-Karabakh (80 per cent of whose present population is Armenian) as part of Armenia, to the arbitrary inclusion of this area within Azerbaijan in 1923 and to the massacre of Armenians in the Azerbaijani town of Sumgait in February 1988,

"C. whereas the deteriorating political situation, which has led to anti-Armenian pogroms in Sumgait and serious acts of violence in Baku, is in itself a threat to the safety of the Armenians living in Azerbaijan,

"1. Condemns the violence employed against Armenian demonstrators in Azerbaijan;

"2. Supports the demand of the Armenian minority for reunification with the Socialist Republic of Armenia;

"...

"4. Calls upon the Soviet authorities to ensure the safety of the 500,000 Armenians currently living in Soviet Azerbaijan and to ensure that those found guilty of having incited or taken part in the pogroms against the Armenians are punished according to Soviet law."

Understanding Sumgait is critical for the peaceful resolution of the Nagorno Karabagh conflict, as today fuelling of anti-Armenian hatred in Azerbaijan continues virulently.

The Azerbaijani leadership, then and now, never expressed remorse over the ethnic cleansing of the Armenians. In fact, the Azeri leadership encouraged the massacres of the Armenians of Azerbaijan, directly and indirectly, through creation of an environment conducive to violence and impunity for such crimes. According to Ilias Izmailov, Azerbaijan's Prosecutor General during the Sumgait pogroms, "Perpetrators of the pogroms now carry mandates and sit in the Parliament" (*Zerkalo*, 21 February 2003).

Exaltation of impunity continues even today. After the vicious act in Budapest, where an Armenian officer was brutally axed in his sleep by an Azerbaijani officer at a NATO "Partnership for Peace" training programme, so-called "committees for the support" of the Azerbaijani military officer were created in Azerbaijan and the perpetrator was depicted as a hero. Just recently he was named the "Man of the Year" by a political party in Azerbaijan.

[1] See also S/2004/168.

There is much to be alarmed about as the policies of ethnic cleansing continue to be utilized by the Azerbaijani leadership incessantly and with impunity. In its zealous effort to erase any Armenian footprint it has embarked on vandalized destruction of centuries-old Armenian monuments in Nakhichevan (Djulfa). This is ever more disturbing as it takes place at a time when the international community takes demonstrable steps to emphasize respect for the cultural and religious diversity of people. These deplorable acts are strongly criticized by the international community. A few days ago, on 16 February 2006, the European Parliament adopted a resolution condemning the systematic destruction of the Armenian *khachkars* in Nakhichevan (Djulfa).

It comes as no surprise that the cultivation and encouragement of war rhetoric by the authorities, and their militaristic policies, which adversely affect the prospects of the peace process, would lead to such gruesome acts. All these could not but raise concerns over the increase of aggressiveness in Azerbaijani society as a result of such encouragements and effective hate propaganda by the top leadership of Azerbaijan. President Ilham Aliyev has repeatedly told his nation that Azerbaijan could launch a new war in Karabagh. Just last week, continuing his President's lead in fuelling aggressiveness and war mongering in the society, a member of the Azerbaijani Parliament, Havva Mammedova, said: "It is time to wipe Armenia from the face of the earth." Today, calls to solve the Nagorno Karabagh conflict by military means are commonplace in Baku. A natural result of this kind of intoxication is an increase in distrust and insecurity, which negatively impacts the whole negotiation process.

Peace in the region can be achieved and maintained only when confidence among nations exist. The latter is possible only through reduction of tension and discontinuation of hate propaganda, which will make the public susceptible to peace, creating a favourable environment for finding a durable solution to the Nagorno Karabagh conflict.

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda items 39, 40, 70 and 71 (b), and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Armen **Martirosyan**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative